

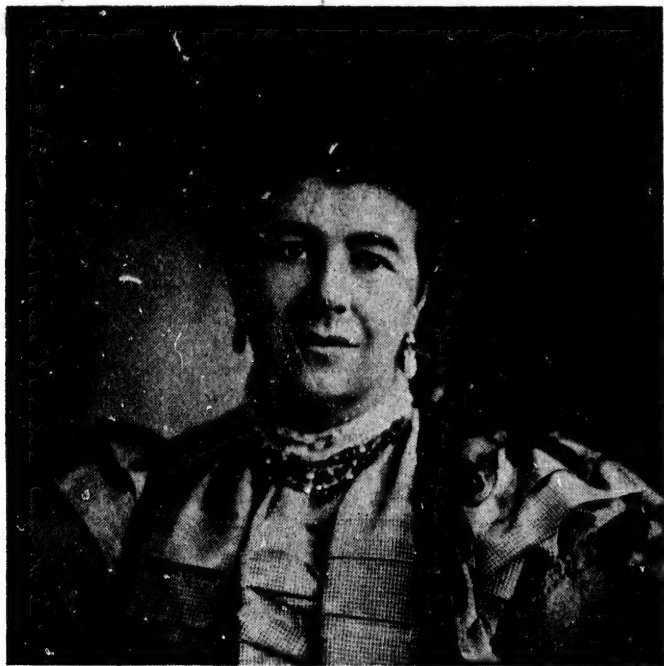
The

Aberdeen Association

sends you

A Hearty Christmas
Greeting

by the band of



ADDRESS

BY

LADY ABERDEEN

PRESIDENT OF THE ABERDEEN ASSOCIATION

AT A

PUBLIC MEETING,

OTTAWA. 1898.

B1331

Lady Aberdeen said :—

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It is difficult for those who are in the inner circle of any Association, and who believe in it, to realize that there is a large circle of people who know absolutely nothing of its operations, and to whom its very name conveys nothing. We, of the Aberdeen Association, for instance who have read hundreds of letters from lonely settlers in all parts of Canada, who have been touched with the intense gratitude expressed for this simple monthly gift of a few old papers and magazines, and who by degrees are realizing the really great benefits that may accrue to the country at large by an organized and systematic circulation of such literature, feel so confident of the sympathy of all good citizens and kindly hearts for this enterprise, that we are apt to forget that there are thousands of people in Canada who know absolutely nothing about our aims. The help which we need is easily obtained, and is not costly if

distributed over a large number, but we do not receive it, simply because we have not taken measures to make our wants known, nor to enlist on our side the help which would assuredly be ours if claimed.

Will you allow me this evening to treat you as if you belonged to the outer world who are strangers to the Aberdeen Association, and may I tell you why and how it was originated, and a little about how it is carried on, and what is the sort of help we require for it?

Those of us who know the great West of this continent can easily picture to themselves the country, the scattered homesteads, the primitive shacks, the miners' huts, which are inhabited by those pioneers who are winning for us this vast and fertile territory at the cost of endless toil and hardship. Doubtless there are many here who have brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, neighbours and friends, out in those western regions, and they will know something about that life which looks so full of freedom and attraction and of golden hope on

the outside, and which, when you come to it, means not only so much grim toil, privation of all comforts, but often the lack of all that makes life worth living to men and women of education and culture. Such conditions are inseparable from a new country, however full of beauty and of natural resources. Its development must be the price of isolation and much hard work, and they are not true friends of the country who would conceal this from intending emigrants. The land is full of hope, and the reward is sure to come, but it has to be striven for.

The traditions of the first settlers of this continent are maintained there by a great effort. Where there are families of children, we will find the little school-house within a possible distance, available for perhaps half the year, and maybe there will be the church. But there you come to the end of the resources of civilization which are at hand.

Look at the walls, bare of pictures and ornaments; look at the little shelf in the corner, with its few treasures which have been read

and re-read, and on the table the little sheet which is published weekly or bi-weekly in the town some dozen or twenty miles off, and which is the only source of information as to what is going on in the outer world. Think of the men, especially the bachelors, who are living out their lives amidst these surroundings, who have to come back to them after their hard day's work. Think, still more, of the women who cannot even have the variety of getting away to the fields or the market, but who have to face the constant monotony and daily drudgery of the housework, year in and year out, if the children are to be cared for and the home is to be kept together. Think of the children who are growing up amidst this environment, where the conversation must naturally turn on the all-absorbing topics of crops and the markets, and whether the ends will meet. Is it any wonder that under these circumstances we hear of the drift of the young people to the cities? Can we believe that that life which is lived in so narrow a groove can tend to the

higher life of the nation of which these people must be the backbone?

In the old country we hear a great deal about the monotony of country life, and of what can be done to overcome it. It does not appear to us that country life in the ordinary sense of the word suffers from monotony when there is any centre of population at all. From what we have observed, there is a flow of life, of fun and sport, and interchange of neighbourliness and simple gaiety, and there is such a definite determination to have church and school and hall and hospital and library in every small centre—which make country life very attractive.

But it is of those who live twenty and thirty and forty miles away from post-office or village, and where neighbours are few and far between—it is of the miners and lumbermen and keepers of lighthouses, as well as of the farmers and ranchers that I am speaking.

What can be done? That is the question which some ladies at

Winnipeg asked one another some eight years ago. Cannot we, whose lives are so amply endowed with opportunities, help our brothers and sisters who are doing so much for us and our country? Out of that question came an answer, which has by degrees grown into an association which desires to reach, as far as possible, all these settlers who cannot obtain reading matter for themselves, who feel that they cannot afford to obtain the literature. These ladies organized a plan by which monthly parcels of literature could be sent out to such settlers. They were very doubtful of the experiment, at first. They did not know how they could get the names of the people who really needed it, or whether it would be abused, or the right people would not get it. They did not know whether they would be able to get enough literature to send. But no sooner was the announcement made to missionaries and to immigration agents and to merchants and others living in these districts, that they would be willing to send out the parcels of old

magazines and books to such persons, than the applications came in fast and furiously. And from that time to this the work has grown, until some fourteen hundred families are supplied every month with parcels of this literature.

One of our rules is, that parcels are only to be sent to such families as are heard from twice a year. There must be correspondence between each family and the lady who is sending out literature. In the first place we always send out a circular asking what sort of literature is desired, what church the family belongs to, whether there are children, whether there is any particular kind of literature desired, and the answer comes back.

Another rule is that every parcel must contain some secular literature and some religious, the latter to be of the character preferred by each recipient, according to the church to which he belongs.

Then, beside the literature, we try from time to time to send them

pictures, games, flower seeds, etc. We are now considering whether something could not be done, by initiating some definite courses of reading with questions, giving certificates, etc. We have tried it in a very small way for the children, and found the most ready response ; and often they write us and ask us for school books, and other books for the education of the children who cannot get to school through many of the winter months. We think that there is surely scope for the useful development of our Association along the lines originated by the Chautauqua system, but in a more simple form.

But far more eloquent than any speeches that can be made on behalf of our Association are the letters received by our workers from the recipients, and which make each feel convinced that her particular list requires the very best of the treasures we have to give.

These letters require no comment. In the words of our Winnipeg Secretary, "comedies and tragedies unfold themselves continually

throughout the year's correspondence, and it often strikes our workers as indeed pathetic that in some instances our Association seems to be the friend to whom they desire first to confide their trouble. The old folks that loved them are no more. 'The friends whom they knew have passed away, or have moved to another part of the country.'

And so for these solitary lives this correspondence with an unknown friend, which seems such a little thing, may yet be doing a great patriotic service, besides unlocking the hearts of those who have grown weary of life's struggle, and who are tempted to think that "nobody cares."

And as regards the parcels themselves, do not these letters give us an idea how the magazines and papers of the Aberdeen Association may shed a radiance over life, charming away the aching sense of loneliness, the feeling of desolation that so often comes to those shut out from the outer world? The story of adventure and the tale of heroism,

the explanation of a scientific truth, the picture of the life of some leaders in thought or action, which we passed over so lightly as we cut the pages of the magazine, have a new meaning when received in those far-away places of the earth. Can we not imagine the rush for the papers when the mail arrives? Can we not picture the breathless interest of the group gathered round the father in the evening? Can we not conceive how new aims and new motives transform the whole life of many a young man and maiden who ponder over an article which has revealed new truths to their hearts?

This then is the work which those who support the Aberdeen Association are doing ; they are helping many a family to fight the battle of life, lightening the burden of overworked fathers and mothers, educating the children in a thousand pleasant ways, and giving wholesome recreation and food for 'thought to many a solitary young fellow

far from all kith and kin, and who may be thereby strengthened against temptation and directed towards noble ends.

And now how do we want you to help us? For I know that your hearts have been stirred and that you long to be participators in this. Perhaps you will say that with free postage granted us by the Post Office authorities, free carriage by the ocean steamships and railway companies, free service rendered by our officers, and free quarters for many of our branches, that we require no assistance. And still more perhaps will you think this when you hear of an English Branch working under the Marchioness of Dufferin at the Imperial Institute, and of a Scotch Branch working at Glasgow, both sending us large contributions. But the truth remains that we do need help, for there are numberless small expenses to be constantly met, the cost of conveying parcels from the railway depots to the various offices, the cost of paper and twine, the postage of letters, printing ex-

penses, and so forth. We should have been long ago bankrupt had it not been for a generous gift of \$500 from Mr. Andrew Carnegie, but we feel that we ought to be able to support ourselves now, and that we ought also to prepare for a time when we shall probably have to pay for the rent of a Central Office and a paid Secretary, owing to our ever-increasing business. We think that a large increase in our membership would best meet the circumstances, each member paying an annual subscription.

But besides subscriptions we want our friends to bear us always in mind when they are disposing of their old magazines, or of any other literature which would be bright and attractive.

And then besides papers and books, and especially consecutive numbers of the same magazine for a year, we are grateful for coloured pictures or prints in good condition, and games small enough to go by post for our Christmas parcels.

And when you have become subscribers, when you have sent us all the nice literature and pretty things you can, please do us yet another service—please speak a good word for us whenever you can. Tell others what the Aberdeen Association means, and how gratefully its parcels are received—tell them that there is no charity, no desire to patronize about it, but merely the expression of a frank brotherly interest between those who live in cities and have abundance of literature at their disposal, and those who live in lonely places and have no such advantages—tell them of the influence that this circulation of good literature is having in the homes of the West, and especially amongst the young people. Tell them that we are not crabbing the country or minimizing its resources or its bright future because we speak of the necessary solitariness of the lives of the brave, bright pioneers who have shown their belief in it by making their homes there, but that we are on the contrary helping to bring happiness and contentment to the

very best class of settlers, who desire something outside material advantages. And tell them too that apart from the direct helpfulness and brightness which our organization brings in its train, that the indirect good of forming links between East and West, between dwellers on the prairie and in the forests with those in the cities is a very real source of strength to the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for coming here to-night, and for showing your interest in this scheme. I thank especially the Ministers and the other friends who are to speak to us, who have spared time to come and express their personal approval, and I leave the Aberdeen Association with the utmost confidence in your hands, and I know that from this evening you will all be Aberdeen Association members. (Applause.)

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Wishing
you and yours

A Merry Christmas

and

A Happy New Year.

